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681 sanction of the recognized marriage ceremonies were ostracized to
684 the extent of having to live outside of the village stockade or, if
736 they belonged to a community living in a single village-house, they were required to occupy a room detached from the main building.
681 The two other classes of ostracized persons, namely, widows and
761 orphans, were supposed to have incurred the displeasure of their
774 "Bgha," and it was feared that their misfortune would become contagious if they were allowed to remain in the village. That is, the "Bgha" of other families would imitate the "Bgha" of the widows' and orphans' families in eating the "k'las" of other husbands and parents, thus depriving the village of more of its members. It was believed that this danger could be avoided by driving the bereft ones into the jungle to shift for themselves. The added risk of the future marriage of these baneful persons was taken into account. This was perhaps negligible in the case of the widows, but the orphans should not be allowed to grow up with other children to become in time eligible for marriage with them. Left to range through the jungle, such orphans, if they survived, generally developed a daring and resourcefulness that inspired the ordinary folk of the village with wonder. Their deeds came to be thought of
[791] as due to a supernatural power. In short, they were believed to be magicians.[1]

Family Relationships

595 In the chapter on Marriage Customs mention is made of the
587 general chastity of the Karen and of their monogamous marriages within the tribe. The rule is for a man to have one wife; but now and then a secondary wife or concubine, known as a "ma po tha," is supported. It may be that on account of the childlessness of the first wife the new connection has been entered into for the sake of offspring, or that the man has simply followed his own inclinations in the matter. Such unions are effected without the formality of marriage ceremonies and are not recognized by Karen society, being entirely irregular.

584 Westerners, accustomed as they are to doing their own courting, sometimes wonder how happy marriages can be effected in the case of young men and women who are strangers and have never met perhaps till they come together in the marriage chamber. We must remember, however, that with a people like the Karen the physical relationship is more significant than the spiritual. Senti-

[1] See Chapter XXVI, pp. 269-270.

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CHAPTER XX

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

When a Karen is ill, his sickness is thought to be due to some action of the malevolent spirits of the unseen world or to the wandering of his "k'la" (life principle or psyche). His malady may be due to an accident, an attack of indigestion after eating too many green mangoes, or an infection of some sort; but, according to his belief, some invisible spirit has been offended by a slight and is the real cause of his disorder.[1]

The seven-fold "k'la," which presides over the life of every person from the time of his birth, will, the Karen believes, determine the time and manner of that person's death. Notwithstanding the fact that one or another of the many causes of death will sometime effect the dissolution of every member of the race, the Karen makes offerings to delay as long as possible the inevitable end. Most propitiatory feasts require the presence of every immediate member of the family, in order to render the feasts acceptable to the spirits. If the sick person seems to be sinking, his relatives will all remain and try to be at hand when he breathes his last.

Karen funerals are by no means solemn occasions. On the contrary, they afford the greatest opportunity for the people to enjoy themselves. I have heard it said that when a considerable time has elapsed since a death in a particular region, the young people long for someone to die, so that they may have a jolly time. The question has often been raised why the Karen, who are not without family affection, conduct themselves in what to Occidentals is a very unseemly manner at the funerals of their dearly beloved ones. Possibly some light is thrown on this question by the story of the fabulous White Python. According to this story, after the python had been compelled to release "Naw Mü E," it took vengeance by killing men in great numbers by discharging its venom on their footprints. It took pleasure in hearing of the suffering and sorrow it was causing the human race and, therefore, redoubled its efforts. The peo-

[1] See Chapter XXIII, pp. 239-245, and Chapter XXIV, pp. 249-254, 257.

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In some sections of the country the village elders try to keep the children away from the dead, lest their "k'las" should be induced to follow its "k'la." In order to divert the attention of the latter from prevailing on the shade of some living person to follow it, the elders pretend to pick up fruit about the room where the body is lying and to put it into the skirts of their garments.

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In the Pegu Hills it is customary to prepare a bier for the body. This is a low bamboo frame ("thi hso law") with a bamboo framework above, over which a blanket or several garments are spread to form a canopy ("ta t' su"). By this means the spirit is supposed to be assured a cool and shady journey to its next abode. The body is usually kept only from one to three days, at the end of which time bits of the finger and toe-nails are pared off and a lock of the hair is cut to be placed in a tiny mat and substituted for the corpse during the remaining days of the funeral rites, and the "mourners" march around them as they would around the corpse itself.

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A ceremony, called "ta le me" or the lighting of the way, takes place in the evening. The Karen people seem to think of the realm of death as quite the reverse of this world. I have sometimes thought that they locate it beneath the earth, but am not sure whether they ascribe a location to it or not. Their conception of the conditions prevailing in the other sphere as opposed to those existing in this one, is shown by the following observance: Two young men take their places on opposite sides of the corpse, one holding a candle between his first and second fingers, as a cigar is held, the palm of the hand being downward. He passes the candle to his fellow, who passes it back, the recipient taking it between the third and fourth digits. The candle is then thrown down beneath the house, while the young men raise their hands and point to the sky, saying to the corpse: "The roots of your trees are there," and then to the ground with the words: "There are the tops of your trees." Pointing in the direction of the source of the neighboring stream, they call it the mouth of the river and then pointing to its mouth, they speak of it as the source.

After this the company file around the body, chanting a "hta" (poem) to the sun. In Siam it is the custom to march around to the left, making the circuit three times, after which the participants begin to recite the following version of this "hta," entitled "The Face of the Sun":

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later is called "ta hu taw pgha a' hki." It is done both on the plains and in the hills. If the person dies in the rainy or the harvest season, the practice is to dispose of the body quickly and hold the burial rites, namely, the games and recitation of the poems or "htas" at a more convenient time.

On their way back from the burning-place the people stop at intervals, look back, wave their hands, and call out: "Pru-r-r k'la, come back, come back." They are summoning their own "k'las" to keep them from remaining behind with that of the dead person. In order to prevent the "k'la" of the deceased from following after them, they set up branches of trees in the path, which is their method of warning friends not to take a certain path. In Siam the funeral party resort to the additional precaution of opening the trunk of a big rotten tree in the jungle the next morning and summoning the "k'la" of the deceased to abide in that. Having provided an offering of rice and water for the nourishment of the spirit here, they address the tree as follows:

"O Rotten Tree, you know hades and the land of the dead.
Be kind enough to show the deceased the way thither."

But few localities are left where the Karen still keep up their old burial-places. These localities are in the hills and on the eastern border of Burma. In these regions an elder of the bereaved family, who is familiar with the burial-place, takes the bones and valuables of the deceased, such as beads, ornaments, etc., to the spot and deposits them with the ashes of his ancestors. A man in the employ of a timber contractor told me of a chance visit made by him to one of these sacred burial-places. With a Karen driver he was in search of a working elephant that had strayed away. After crossing two or three mountain ridges and the intervening valleys, the Karen remarked that they were approaching his ancestral burial-spot and consented to lead his companion to it. They climbed to the top of the next ridge, where the ground was covered with huge boulders. Threading their way among these, they emerged into a grassy plot in the midst of which lay a boulder larger than the others, and, after clambering to the top of this rock, they found therein a deep hole in which the family relics of the elephant driver were deposited. His companion thrust the shaft of his spear nearly its whole length into the hole, the mouth of which was not more than four of five inches in diameter, and, poking about, could hear

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the string. Hence, offerings of food must be continued to prevent the "k'la" from exercising its enticing power on that of some living relative.

The "k'las" of the children are thought to be especially susceptible to such influence, and among the Bwes extraordinary precautions are taken to protect the children. The Bwe grandmother, who is head of the "Bgha" feast, wraps a pair of fowls in a number of garments, each of her grandchildren supplying one. She then calls back the spirits of the children to prevent them from being attracted by the "Mü xa." After the necks of the fowls have been wrung their flesh is eaten by the family, while the "Mü xa" are supposed to feed upon the essence of the chickens.

The Karen bury their children soon after death, and seem to take no further notice of their passing. When parents have had the misfortune to lose several of their offspring shortly after birth, they believe that the spirits from some vague region have sought mortal birth through their instrumentality, simply to gain the ornaments and trinkets that Karen are in the habit of giving to their children. Having secured these coveted possessions, the spirits return to their former abode with their undeserved rewards. The Karen call this fleeting existence "ta plu aw ka," which means "gaining something by entering life." Parents thus taken advantage of, as they feel, have recourse to a revolting method of terrifying a spirit of this greedy type. After a child has died and been carried to the burial-place, the indignant father thrusts a spear or sword through and through the little body or slashes it with a "dah," that is, a long knife, in the hope that the spirit, seeing how badly its temporary mortal tenement is being treated, may fear to come back again.

Our study of funeral customs among the Karen shows that, in the case of adults at least, funerals are festal and feasting occasions. Much rice and pork curry are consumed and, in the olden time, liquor flowed freely. In earlier times when people of different villages met at a funeral, a spirit of rivalry was shown in the improvising and chanting of the poems and sometimes in other ways. I have in my possession an old bronze funeral drum, which was reputed to be the sweetest sounding drum in the hills at the head of Thonze Creek.[4] On its rim "dah" cuts appear which are the lasting marks of a fight in which rival groups of villagers engaged

[4] See Chapter XIII on Bronze Drums, pp. 121-122.

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776 offerings and ceremonies and were hoping for the return of the white brother with the Lost Book.

BELIEFS CONCERNING THE SOUL AND THE LIFE PRINCIPLE

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761 The Karen distinguish between the "tha" or soul and the "k'la" or life principle (shade) of every human being. They think of the soul as the seat of their moral nature, endowed with conscience, that is, the power of apprehending right and wrong, and with a personality that persists after death. The soul is responsible and is judged for the acts in the flesh. The "k'la" is more intimately associated with one's physical existence. It is the force that keeps one alive and well. As it is being constantly solicited by demons and more or less by the "k'las" of dead relatives to leave the body, it needs the protection of charms, offerings, and medicines.[13] As the "k' la" comes from a previous existence to inhabit the body at the time of birth and departs into a new existence at death, so also it leaves the body for brief periods and at frequent intervals, as during sleep. If it remains away longer than usual, its absence causes the sickness and even the death of
[513] the body. As the "k' la" may be away visiting friends or on other errands during the sleeping hours, it is not safe to waken a sleeper suddenly. His "k' la" may not have yet returned, in which case he could not long survive. One Karen told me that he had dreamed of seeing various persons in heaven and hell and naively remarked that his "k' la" must have journeyed to those abodes during his sleep. Another Karen, whose wife underwent a surgical operation at a hospital in the city, asked me whether the ether cone was not used to extract and hold her "k' la," in order to render her unconscious, the "k' la" being restored to her to enable her to regain her faculties. The "k' las" of children are supposed to be peculiarly susceptible to being enticed away by those of the dead. Hence, it is customary to tie children up in the house while a corpse is being carried out. I have experienced considerable difficulty in inducing the inhabitants of outlying villages to let me take their pictures, for fear their "k' las" would be carried off along with the photo-

[13] A full study of the Karen "k' la" and "tha" was made by the early missionaries to determine which of these two words should be used in translating the word, soul. "Tha" was the word finally chosen. The results of these studies are recorded, those of Dr. Wade, in *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, 442, ff, and those of Dr. Mason in the *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXX, Pt. II, 196, ff.

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graph.[14] In the early days when white men were still a strange sight to the people, they would beat their breasts and call their "k' las" to come back, evidently fearing that the latter would follow in curiosity after the strangers. A friend of mine had a similar experience among the Karen of Siam only a few years ago.

The people think that a wandering "k'la" may remain invisible or assume the form of the person himself. Stories are told of these wandering ghosts. A man who had been absent from his village met the apparition of his wife on his way home. It informed him that it was going to see its mother, but it consented to spend the night with him in the jungle. As they had no food, the ghost, which was supposed by the man to be his wife in person, went back to their house and took what food it wanted from the cooking pots, without revealing itself at all. Next morning the man and his ghostly wife took their separate paths, the former being greatly shocked on arriving in the village to find the burial rites of his wife in progress. Realizing that it was his wife's "k'la" which he had met in the jungle, he wished that he had called it back. Another story relates that a husband was so incensed at seeing his wife (the apparition being really her "k'la") wandering abroad that he struck her in the face. This act had the desired effect, for the "k' la" hastened back to its deserted body and thereby put an abrupt end to the funeral ceremonies, which were already in progress. This wandering propensity of the "k'la" leads to other complications than those already mentioned. The elders are authority for the statement that even though a couple are living together as man and wife, their "k' las" may form unions with those of other persons, especially during the hours of sleep. Even the efforts of a necromancer to summon the wandering "k' la" of a sick person may result in attracting the "k' la" of some other person to occupy the deserted body, in whose behalf the efforts are being put forth. The new occupant may remain only while generous offerings are made to it, and the sick person is sure to experience a serious relapse when it leaves.

It seems to be believed also that the "k' las" of human beings may take on other forms, such as those of insects. Animals have "k' las" which can do the same thing. Sometimes when moths are

[14] Sir J. G. Frazer quotes Dr. Nieuwenhuis, who tells of a similar experience among the people of Borneo: *Golden Bough*, Vol. III, p. 98. Some of the Karen object to having their photographs taken on account of their fear of sympathetic magic, that is, they fear that an accident to the photograph would cause a similar one to the original.

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flying about a light people say: "Let the 'k' las" of beasts and other creatures fall into the flame, but let the 'k' las' of men fly carefully and save themselves."

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Inanimate objects have their "k' las," as well as the lower creatures. Ownership in such possessions is duly observed by killing the pigs and fowls of a woman when she dies. The remains are thrown away or given to foreigners, who do not share the superstitions of the Karen. The paddy-cleaning implements and clothing of the deceased are either burned or buried with the corpse, unless they are laid on top of her grave. In like manner the oxen belonging to a man who has died are killed and disposed of, while his personal effects are burned or put in the grave with him. Otherwise, the owner's "k' la" might return to the village for his property and thereby bring calamity on the inhabitants.

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The idea seems to prevail among the Karen that the "k' las" enter and leave their bodies through the fontanel on the top of the head. In case a child falls and cries the mother will blow on this spot, in order to keep the life principle from escaping. However, the customary method of preventing the escape of the "k' la" is to tie a string around the wrists, either one or both of them, after fanning up the arms to blow the "k' la" back. Anybody may perform this act, but the services of elders or necromancers ("wi") are preferred.

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Another conception of the "k' la," quite distinct from that set forth above, is that it is a seven-fold spirit inhabiting the body, whose death it is constantly striving to accomplish through one or another of seven methods, namely, insanity, licentiousness, epilepsy, oppression, diseases, accidents, and injury by wild beasts. Even from the birth of a person the seven-fold "k' la" accepts the responsibility of causing his or her death and is engaged in constant struggle with that person's "so" (personality or character) for the mastery. As long as the "so" is strong, it serves as the individual's guardian angel; and he remains immune both from the attacks of the seven-fold "k' la" and from the magic arts of witches and necromancers. However powerful the charm that may be employed against him, his dominating "so" will ward it off; but if his "so" should become weak, he will soon lose his immunity.[13]

[13] See Dr. J. Wade's account in *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 488, ff.

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Certain stones ("ler na") and some plants of the ginger family ("paw na") are credited with having the ability to consume food. If offered raw flesh and blood, they prefer the latter. The owners of such specimens can cause harm to any one against whom they have a grudge. In case one of the "ler na" is sent to a person, it takes on the appearance of the owner and produces the death of the recipient. Such stones, according to report, are usually picked up in swampy places, glow in the dark, and will eat into one's flesh like an acid. It seems to be customary to send one of these carnivorous stones to the intended victim when he is in a weakened condition on account of sickness. He is, therefore, in a physical state to experience such an hallucination as that referred to above.

To counteract the effects of the "ler na," a medicine is compounded from the gall-bladder of one who has suffered a violent death and been stolen from the grave at night. The remains of the gall-bladder are mixed with the charred dust scraped from the bamboos used in piercing the corpse when it was being burned. These ingredients are moistened with water and shaped into a ball, from which the patient takes doses when he finds the spell of the magic stone asserting itself. Other fragments of the medicine-ball are pulverized and scattered in the air about the patient. This internal and external treatment is supposed to afford both cure and protection from the menace of the "ler na."[1] Another method (called "po") of preventing witches and wizards from working their evil spells, is by inserting twigs of the indigo plant in the split ends of three sticks, spitting on the twigs, and offering a prayer for deliverance.

Much of the magic of the Karen prophets and "medicine-teachers" is concerned with recalling the "k'las" of sick persons. The multitude of demons and powers by which the tribesman believes himself to be surrounded, renders it next to impossible for him to tell which of these spirits is assailing him when he falls ill. Hence he calls in a diviner, unless he should undertake to consult the chicken bones or make marks on a bamboo, in order to determine for himself the cause of his sickness. When he has learned the cause, he makes offerings to placate the particular spirit concerned. In case his recovery is not as rapid as he thinks it ought to be, he calls in some "wi" to find out what the matter is and what he must do. The "wi" who was summoned to prescribe for a sick grandmother some years ago, inspected the chicken bones several times and, when

1 Dr. Wade, The Karen Thesaurus, new ed., Vol. I, p. 463.

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774 792 755 he got a satisfactory divination, placed some rice, cooked chicken, and liquor on a tray and drew it along the floor of the house to the top of the ladder at the entrance. He then ran a string from the tray down the ladder to the ground for the old woman's "k' la" or shade to come up on. The "k' la" did not return because, as the witch-doctor explained, it was held captive in a betel-box by some one. Thereupon, he asked for seven cubits of white cloth, wound it about himself, and lay down to sleep with a "dah" (large knife) and an axe on either side of him. With the shades of these tools in hand his "k' la" was to go and release the shade or spirit of the grandmother. On awaking, the witch-doctor reported that he had had a hard struggle and been shot at by the man who was restraining the old woman's spirit from returning, but that he had succeeded in releasing it. When the doctor unwrapped himself, so the granddaughter of the patient told me, the cloth was riddled with what appeared to be shot holes. The string on the ladder was broken, showing conclusively that the "k' la" had returned at last. A piece of this string was now tied around the patient's wrist to prevent her spirit from again escaping. Needless to say, the old woman recovered her health.

764 789 A ceremony is sometimes observed among the Karen to keep the "k' la" of a deceased person from aimlessly wandering about and to beguile it into remaining with the corpse, until it shall depart to the king of spirits. In this ceremony the coffined body is placed in the center of the floor. A slender rod of bamboo is inserted in a hole in the coffin lid, a thread reaching from the tip of the bamboo to the floor. This thread has small tufts of cotton and bits of charcoal tied to it in alternate order throughout its length. Under the loose end of the thread a small cup containing a hard-boiled egg is placed. A silver or brass ring hangs at the end of the thread just over the cup. In case the thread is drawn downward with some force so that it vibrates or breaks, the "k' la" is supposed to have returned from its wanderings, otherwise not. Colonel MacMahon relates that he watched an experiment of this kind, but that when he required everybody to go a considerable distance from the cup, nothing happened.[5]

826 828 Among the Karen and Burmese the abdomen is held to be the seat of the passions and the diseases, varying moods and bodily

[5] A similar ceremony is gone through at noon of the last day of the funeral rites. See ante, p. 237: Col. A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 188; Cross, in the *Journal, American Oriental Society*, Vol. I.